

The Newton Traffic Park

A proposal for consideration by the Newton Parks and Recreation Commission

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A Simple Traffic Park in Western Springs, IL

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1. Executive Summary

Bike Newton proposes the Newton Traffic Park (NTP) for the purpose of expanding bike and pedestrian education and recreation. The NTP will address a critical need in Newton to deliver education on bicycle and pedestrian safety to children, and promote lifelong healthy habits of active recreation and mobility. The NTP is aligned with the mission of Newton Parks and Recreation, including providing “innovative recreation activities”. By using low environmental impact, removable cellular grass surface, it also contributes to the “preservation, maintenance, and enhancement of the natural resources of the City”. The NTP adds to the value of Newton’s prized park and recreational facilities in Newton’s civic life by extending their impacts beyond the borders of Newton’s parks and recreational facilities for the benefit of citizens using our streets, sidewalks, and schools.

Using best practices and designs from traffic parks and “safety towns” in US cities and in Europe, the NTP contains all of the crucial elements of our streets and sidewalks which children must learn to safely navigate for the rest of their lives – blind driveways, car door danger zones, intersections and crosswalks. Bike Newton seeks to engage the Parks and Recreation Commission, along with a broad coalition of community partners including the Newton Police Department, Newton’s Safe Routes to School Program, the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, the Hyde Community Center, local businesses, and the Christina Clarke Genco Foundation, in building upon the basic concept and plan presented here to ultimately realize a facility that may both save lives and provide a new and enjoyable educational and recreational experience for Newton’s children.

2. Statement of Need and Purpose

Newton aspires to be a bike and pedestrian friendly city. Our community has made significant progress toward that goal in recent years, achieving Bronze status as a Bike Friendly Community (League of American Bicyclists) in 2013-14, but a crucial gap remains. Education on biking and pedestrian safety continues to be underdeveloped and uneven across Newton's public schools. For example, although Newton participates in the national Safe Routes to School Program, Brown Middle School has elected not to participate because of legitimate concerns that encouraging students to bike is promoting an unsafe activity. Last year, a motor vehicle collision occurred on Parker Street involving a student biking to Brown Middle School who, to our knowledge, had no formal bike safety training. There is no systematic training offered in our schools on basic road and sidewalk hazards to pedestrians and bicyclists, such as crossing blind driveways, or avoiding "right hooks" where a crosswalk walk sign coincides with a green right turn across it for automobiles.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control, childhood obesity has doubled and adolescent obesity has quadrupled in the US over the last three decades. Increased dependence on automobiles, which contributes to sedentary behaviors among children, is a concern in Newton as it is in communities across the nation.

The health and recreational benefits of walking and biking make promoting them a desirable policy goal, but road and sidewalk safety hazards in Newton must be addressed before we can promote walking and bicycling without hesitation. Some of Newton's safety issues can be addressed through engineering better pedestrian and

bicycle accommodations, but no level of safety engineering can be a substitute for safe behavior of pedestrians and bicyclists. There are many critical areas on our streets and sidewalks where pedestrians and bicyclists come into direct potential conflict with motor vehicles, even when the rules of the road are unambiguous and road and sidewalk conditions are fully compliant with the appropriate regulations. Examples include motor vehicle crossings across sidewalks, where cars may be either entering or backing out of driveways while children are crossing on the sidewalk. Our observations are that, unless children are educated about the dangers of crossing such conflict zones, they often assume that conditions are safe, to their peril.

The NTP presents a safe environment in which trained educators simulate potentially dangerous situations by acting out scenarios with direct participation by children. Moreover, the NTP represents a fun and empowering experience for children who are taught to be self-reliant and empowered to be in charge of their own safety and transportation choices. Traffic parks in the US and Europe show that while teaching important lessons about safety, children find the experience fun and entertaining, to the extent that some traffic parks (like Verkeerspark in Assen, the Netherlands) operate as theme parks and charge admission.

3. Plan for the Newton Traffic Park

3.1. Physical considerations, layout and construction

The NTP should be in a central and highly accessible location where it will not displace other recreational uses. The NTP should conform to Complete Streets Design principles and the Urban Street Design Guide of the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO; <http://nacto.org/usdg/>). Core elements of the NTP may include:

General features:

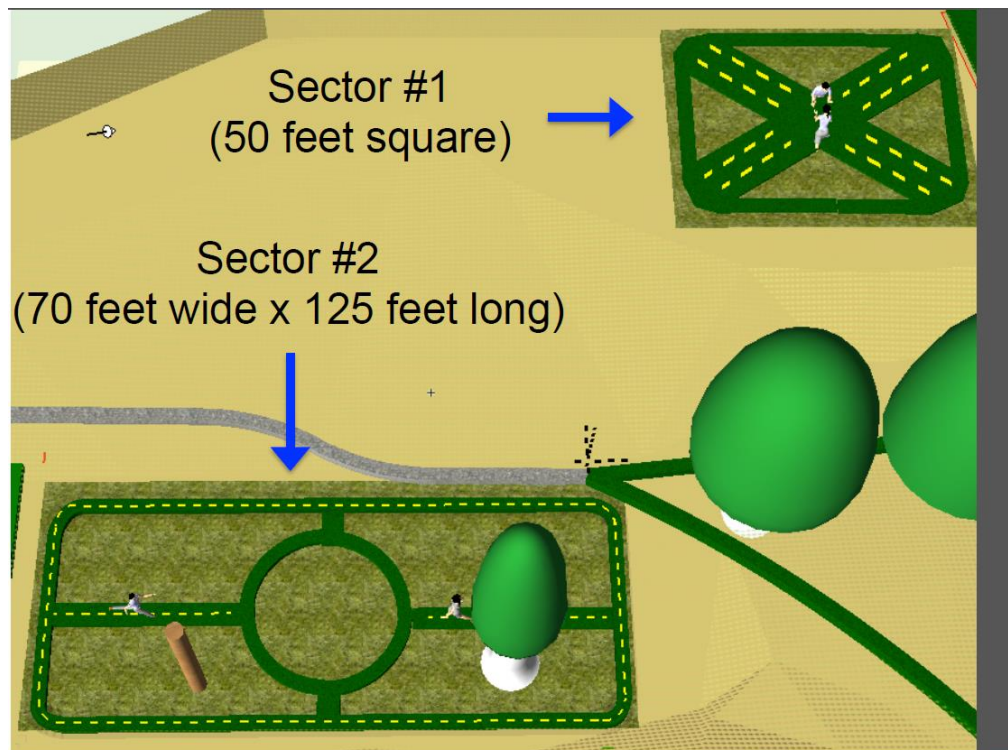
- Stop signs, yield signs, and other road signs
- Pavement markings
- Traffic lights
- Crosswalks
- Sidewalks
- Can utilize tunnels and bridges if necessary to make efficient use of space
- Building facades
- Trees, grass, and other landscaping elements
- Should be as flat as possible to ease driving and riding

Specific features:

- Roundabout with bike lane
- 4-Way Intersection with lights
- 4-Way Intersection with stop signs
- Railroad crossing

A site in the eastern portion of the Newton Centre Playground will be used illustrate what the NTP could be. We welcome suggestions from the Newton Parks and Recreation Commission regarding suitable sites that are flat, with good drainage, centrally located and, above all, places to which elementary school children can safely bike. Our example NTP on this site would consist of approximately 11,250 square feet, probably, but not necessarily, contiguous. It will be landscaped and use permeable pavement. Figure 1 below shows a conceptual layout of the NTP. We consider this to be a starting point for discussion with the Parks and Recreation Commission, and we invite feedback from the Commission in determining an exact layout, dimensions, and location of the NTP.

Figure 1: *Conceptual Overview of the Example Newton Traffic Park*



3.2. Operations and Educational Activities

The facility will enable safety educators from the Newton Police Department and from Bike Newton, which offers bicycle safety education courses in the Newton Public Schools in conjunction with MassBike and the League of American Bicyclists, and other groups, to provide classes and small group safety instruction. The public will be welcome and encouraged to use the space for practicing and mastering on-road bicycling skills. In addition to the Newton Police, Parks & Recreation, Public Schools, and Transportation Departments, we will be partnering with Newton Safe Routes to School, the West Suburban YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Hyde Center and other non-profit groups to promote the use of this facility.

3.3. Business Plan and Financing

The cost of the project is expected to be \$150-200k, paid for by individual and foundation contributions. In addition, we would carefully consider sponsorship opportunities by locally owned businesses. Like our wonderful library system, the facility would be free and open to all.

4. Proposed Timeline

We expect to design the NTP, in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Commission and other stakeholders, in 2015 and build it in 2016. Maintenance will be done by the Newton Department of Parks and Recreation and by volunteers from Bike Newton, as part of our participation in Newton Serves.

5. Appendix 1: Some Traffic Parks and Safety Towns in Other Cities

(Compiled by Ben Green)

Western Springs, IL



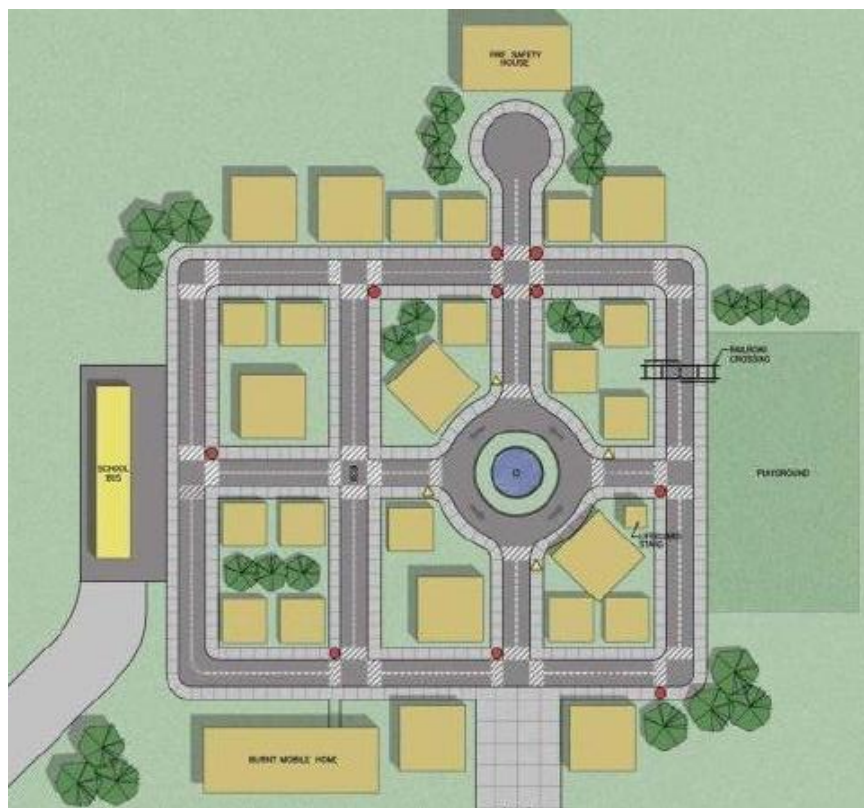
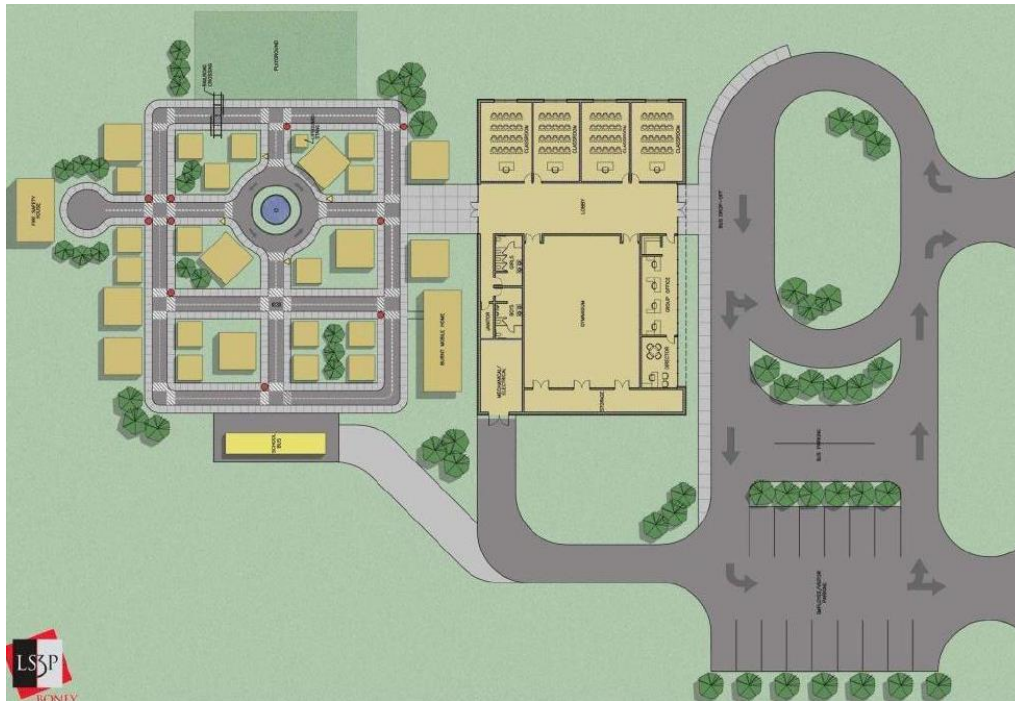
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Utrecht, NL



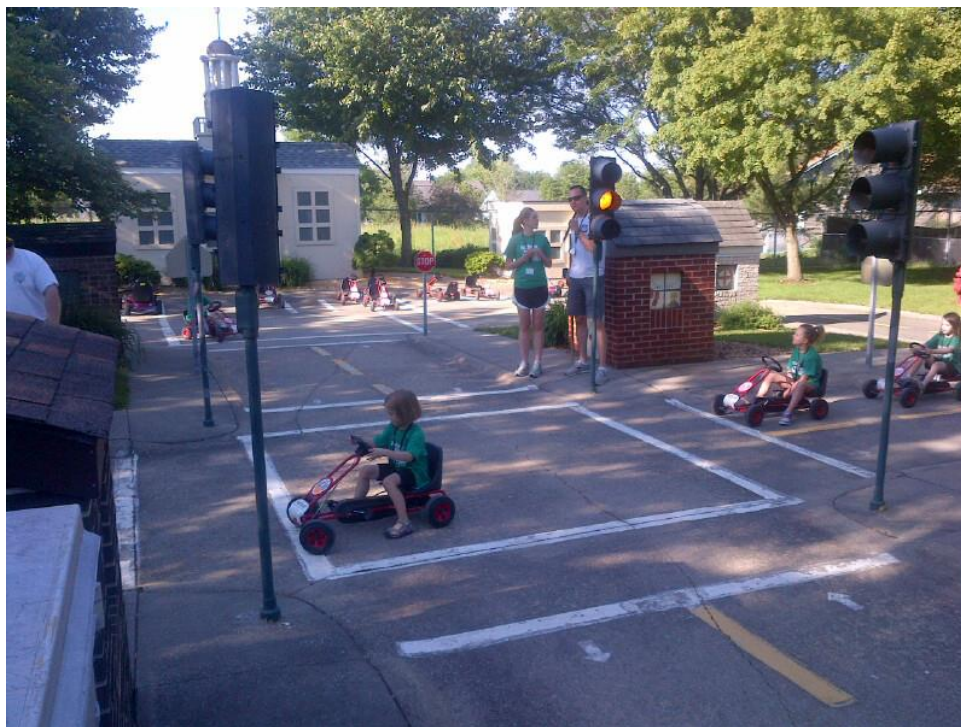
Southeastern North Carolina Children's Safety Village

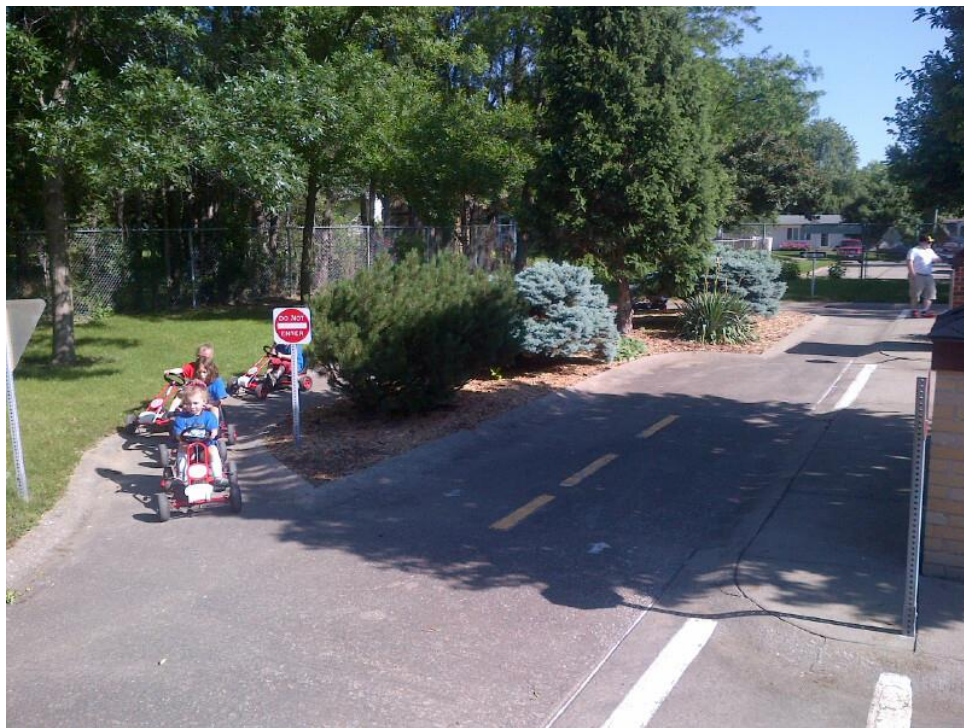


Glen Ellyn, IL



Iowa City, IA





Cobb County, GA





Windsor, Canada

